

True and False Personality

by C.C. Massey, F.T.S.

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(*The Theosophist*, March 1880) The title prefixed to the following observations may well have suggested a more metaphysical treatment of the subject than can be attempted on the present occasion. The doctrine of the trinity, or trichotomy of man, which distinguishes soul from spirit, comes to us with such weighty, venerable, and even sacred authority that we may well be content, for the moment, with confirmations that should be intelligible to all, forbearing the abstruser questions which have divided minds of the highest philosophical capacity. We will not now inquire whether the difference is one of states or of entities; whether the phenomenal or mind consciousness is merely the external condition of one indivisible Ego, or has its origin and nature in an altogether different principle; the Spirit, or immortal part of us being of Divine birth, while the senses and understanding, with the consciousness — Ahankara — thereto appertaining, are from an *Anima Mundi*, or what in the Sankhya philosophy is called Prakriti. My utmost expectations will have been exceeded if it should happen that any considerations here offered should throw even a faint suggestive light upon the bearings of this great problem. It may be that the mere irreconcilability of all that is characteristic of the temporal Ego with the conditions of the superior life — if that can be made apparent — will incline you to regard the latter rather as the Redeemer, that has indeed to be born within us for our salvation and our immortality, than as the inmost, central, and inseparable principle of our phenomenal life. It may be that by the light of such reflexions the sense of identity will present no insuperable difficulty to the conception of its contingency, or to recognition that the mere consciousness which fails to attach itself to a higher principle is no guarantee of an eternal individuality.

It is only by a survey of what individuality, regarded as the source of all our affections, thoughts, and actions, is, that we can realise its intrinsic worthlessness, and only when we have brought ourselves to a real and felt acknowledgment of that fact, can we accept with full understanding those "hard sayings" of sacred authority which bid us "die to ourselves," and which proclaim the necessity of a veritable new birth. This mystic death and birth is the keynote of all profound religious teaching; and that which distinguishes the ordinary religious mind from spiritual insight is just the tendency to interpret these expressions as merely figurative, or, indeed, to overlook them altogether.

Of all the reproaches which modern Spiritualism, with the prospect it is thought to hold out of an individual temporal immortality, has had to encounter, there is none that we can less afford to neglect than that which represents it as an ideal essentially egotistical and *borne*. True it is that our critics do us injustice through ignorance of the enlarged views as to the progress of the soul in which the speculations of individual Spiritualists coincide with many remarkable spirit teachings. These are, undoubtedly, a great advance upon popular theological opinions, while some of them go far to satisfy the claim of Spiritualism to be regarded as a religion. Nevertheless, that slight estimate of individuality, as we know it, which in

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one view too easily allies itself to materialism, is also the attitude of spiritual idealism, and is seemingly at variance with the excessive value placed by Spiritualists on the discovery of our mere psychic survival. The idealist may recognise this survival, but, whether he does so or not, he occupies a post of vantage when he tells us that it is of no ultimate importance. For he, like the Spiritualist who proclaims his "proof palpable of immortality," is thinking of the mere temporal, self-regarding consciousness — its sensibilities, desires, gratifications and affections — which *are* unimportant absolutely, that is to say, their importance is relative solely to the individual. There is, indeed, no more characteristic outbirth of materialism than that which makes a teleological centre of the individual. Ideas have become mere abstractions, the only reality is the infinitely little. Thus utilitarianism can see in the State only a collection of individuals whose "greatest happiness", mutually limited by nice adjustment to the requirements of "the greatest numbers," becomes the supreme end of government and law. And it cannot, I think, be pretended that Spiritualists in general have advanced beyond this substitution of a relative for an absolute standard. Their "glad tidings of great joy" are not truly religious. They have regard to the perpetuation in time of that lower consciousness whose manifestations, delights and activity, are in time, and of time alone. Their glorious message is not essentially different from that which we can conceive as brought to us by some great alchemist, who had discovered the secret of conferring upon us and upon our friends a mundane perpetuity of youth and health. Its highest religious claim is that it enlarges the horizon of our opportunities. As such, then, let us hail it with gratitude and relief, but, on peril of our salvation, if I may not say of our immortality, let us not repose upon a prospect which is, at best, one of renewed labours and trials, and efforts to be free even of that very life whose only value is opportunity.

To estimate the value of individuality, we cannot do better than regard man in his several mundane relations, supposing that either of these might become the central, actuating focus of his being — his "ruling love", as Swedenborg would call it — displacing his mere egoism, or self-love, thrusting that more to the circumference, and identifying him, as to speak, with that circle of interests to which all his energies and affections relate. Outside this substituted ego we are to suppose that he has no conscience, no desire, no will. Just as the entirely selfish man views the whole of life, so far as it can really interest him solely in relation to his individual well-being, so our supposed man of a family, of a society, of a church, or a State, has no eye for any truth or any interest more abstract or more individual than that of which he may be rightly termed the incarnation. History shows approximations to this ideal man. Such a one, for instance, I conceive to have been Loyola, such another, possibly, is Bismarck. Now these men have ceased to be individuals in their own eyes, so far as concerns any value attaching to their own special individualities. They are devotees. A certain "conversion" has been effected, by which from mere individuals they have become "representative" men. And we — the individuals — esteem them precisely in proportion to the remoteness from individualism of the spirit that actuates them. As the circle of interests to which they are "devoted" enlarges — that is to say, as the dross of individualism is purged away — we accord them indulgence, respect, admiration and love. From self to the family, from the family to the sect or society, from the sect or society to the Church (in no denominational sense) and State, there is the ascending scale and widening circle, the successive transitions which make the worth of an individual depend on the more or less complete subversion of his individuality by a more comprehensive soul or spirit. The very modesty which suppresses, as far as possible, the personal pronoun in our addresses to others, testifies to our sense that we are hiding away some utterly insignificant and unworthy thing; a thing that has no business even to be, except in that utter privacy which is rather a sleep and a rest than living. Well, but in the above instances, even those most remote from sordid individuality, we have fallen far short of that ideal in which the very conception of the partial, the atomic, is lost in the abstraction of universal being, transfigured in the glory of a Divine personality. You are familiar with Swedenborg's distinction between discrete and continuous degrees. Hitherto we have seen how man — the individual — may rise continuously by throwing himself heart and soul into the

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living interests of the world, and lose his own limitations by adoption of a larger mundane spirit. But still he has but ascended nearer to his own mundane source, that soul of the world, or Prakriti to which, if I must not too literally insist on it, I may still resort as a convenient figure. To transcend it, he must advance by the discrete degree. No simple "bettering" of the ordinary self, which leaves it alive, as the focus — the French word "foyer" is the more expressive — of his thoughts and actions; not even that identification with higher interests in the world's plane just spoken of, is, or can progressively become, in the least, adequate to the realisation of his Divine ideal. This "bettering" of our present nature, it alone being recognised as essential, albeit capable of "improvement", is a commonplace and, to use a now familiar term, a "Philistine" conception. It is the substitution of the continuous for the discrete degree. It is a compromise with our dear old familiar selves. "And Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fallings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." We know how little acceptable that compromise was to the God of Israel; and no illustration can be more apt than this narrative, which we may well, as we would fain, believe to be rather typical than historical. Typical of that indiscriminate and radical sacrifice, or "vastation," of our lower nature, which is insisted upon as the one thing needful by all, or nearly all [Of the higher religions teachings of Mohammedanism I know next to nothing, and therefore cannot say if it should be excepted from the statement.]the great religions of the world. No language could seem more purposely chosen to indicate that it is the individual nature itself, and not merely its accidental evils, that has to be abandoned and annihilated. It is not denied that what was spared was good; there is no suggestion of an universal infection of physical or moral evil; it is simply that what is good and useful relatively to a lower state of being must perish with it if the latter is to make way for something better. And the illustration is the more suitable in that the purpose of this paper is not ethical, but points to a metaphysical conclusion, though without any attempt at metaphysical exposition. There is no question here of moral distinctions; they are neither denied nor affirmed. According to the highest moral standard, A may be a most virtuous and estimable person. According to the lowest, B may be exactly the reverse. The moral interval between the two is within what I have called, following Swedenborg, the "continuous degree". And perhaps the distinction can be still better expressed by another reference to that Book which we theosophical students do not less regard, because we are disposed to protest against all exclusive pretensions of religious systems. The good man who has, however, not yet attained his "sonship of God" is "under the law" — that moral law which is educational and preparatory, "the schoolmaster to bring us into Christ," our own Divine spirit, or higher personality. To conceive the difference between these two states is to apprehend exactly what is here meant by the false, temporal, and the true, eternal personality, and the sense in which the word personality is here intended to be understood. We do not know whether, when that great change has come over us, when that great work [The "great work", so often mentioned by the Hermetic philosophers; and which is exactly typified by the operation of alchemy, the conversion of the base metals to gold — is now well understood to refer to the analogous spiritual conversion. There is also good reason to believe that the material process was a real one.] of our lives has been accomplished — here or hereafter — we shall or shall not retain a sense of identity with our past, and for ever discarded selves. In philosophical parlance, the "matter" will have gone, and the very "form" will have been changed. Our transcendental identity with the A or B that now is [A person may have won his immortal life, and remained the same *inner self* he was on earth, through eternity; but this does not imply necessarily that he must either remain the Mr. Smith or Brown be was on earth, or lose his individuality." — "Isis Unveiled", Volume 1, page 316] must depend on that question, already disclaimed in this paper, whether the Divine spirit is our originally central essential being, or is an hypostasis. Now, being "under the law" implies that we do not act directly from our own will, but indirectly, that is, in willing obedience to another will. The will from which we should naturally act — our own will — is of course to be understood not as mere volition, but as our nature — our "ruling love," which makes such and such things agreeable to us, and others the reverse. As "under the law," this nature is kept in suspension, and because it is suspended only as to its activity and

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manifestation, and by no means abrogated, is the law — the substitution of a foreign will — necessary for us. Our own will or nature is still central; that which we obey by effort and resistance to ourselves is more circumferential or hypostatic. Constancy in this obedience and resistance tends to draw the circumferential will more and more to the centre, till there ensues that "explosion," as St. Martin called it, by which our natural will is for ever dispersed and annihilated by contact with the divine, and the latter henceforth becomes our very own. Thus has "the schoolmaster" brought us unto "Christ," and if by "Christ" we understand no historically divine individual, but the logos, word, or manifestation of God *in us* — then we have, I believe, the essential truth that was taught in the Vedanta, by Kapila, by Buddha, by Confucius, by Plato, and by Jesus. There is another presentation of possibly the same truth, for a reference to which I am indebted to our brother J. W. Farquhar. It is from Swedenborg, in the *Apocalypse Explained*, No. 527: — "Every man has an interior or exterior mind, and a mind superior or inferior. These two minds are altogether distinct. By the inferior mind man is in the natural world together with men there; but by the superior mind he is in the spiritual world with the angels there. These two minds are so distinct that man so long as he lives in the world does not know what is performing within himself in his superior mind; but when he becomes a spirit, which is immediately after death, he does not know what is performing in his mind." The consciousness of the "superior mind," as a result of mere separation from the earthly body, certainly does not suggest that sublime condition which implies separation from so much more than the outer garment of flesh, but otherwise the distinction between the two lives, or minds, seems to correspond with that now under consideration.

What is it that strikes us especially about this substitution of the divine-human for the human-natural personality? Is it not the loss of individualism? (Individualism, pray observe, not individuality.) There are certain sayings of Jesus, which have probably offended many in their hearts, though they may not have dared to acknowledge such a feeling to themselves: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and those other disclaimers of special ties and relationships which mar the perfect sympathy of our reverence. There is something awful and incomprehensible to us in this repudiation of individualism, even in its most amiable relations. But it is in the Aryan philosophies that we see this negation of all that we associate with individual life most emphatically and explicitly insisted on. It is, indeed, the impossibility of otherwise than thus negatively characterising the soul that has attained Moksha (deliverance from bonds), which has caused the Hindu consummation to be regarded as the loss of individuality and conscious existence. It is just because we cannot easily dissociate individuality from individualism that we turn from the sublime conception of primitive philosophy as from what concerns us as little as the ceaseless activity and germination in other brains of thought once thrown off and severed from the thinking source, which is the immortality promised by Mr. Frederick Harrison to the select specimens of humanity whose thoughts have any reproductive power. It is not a mere preference of nothingness, or unconscious absorption, to limitation that inspires the intense yearning of the Hindu mind for Nirvana. Even in the Upanishads there are many evidences of a contrary belief, while in the Sankhya the aphorisms of Kapila unmistakably vindicate the individuality of soul (spirit). Individual consciousness is maintained, perhaps infinitely intensified, but its "matter" is no longer personal. Only try to realise what "freedom from desire," the favourite phrase in which individualism is negated in these systems, implies! Even in that form of devotion which consists in action, the soul is warned in the Bhagavad-Gita that it must be indifferent to results.

Modern Spiritualism itself testifies to something of the same sort. Thus we are told by one of its most gifted and experienced champions: "Sometimes the evidence will come from an impersonal source, from some instructor who has passed through the plane on which individuality is demonstrable." — M. A. (Oxon), *Spirit Identity*, p. 7. Again: "And if he" (the investigator) "penetrates far enough, he will find

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himself in a region for which his present embodied state unfits him: a region in which the very individuality is merged, and the highest and subtlest truths are not locked within one breast, but emanate from representative companies whose spheres of life are inter-blended." — *Id.*, p. 15. By this "inter-blending" is of course meant only a perfect sympathy and community of thought; and I should doubtless misrepresent the author quoted, were I to claim an entire identity of the idea he wishes to convey, and that now under consideration. Yet what, after all, is sympathy but the loosening of that hard "astringent" quality (to use Buche's phrase) wherein individualism consists? And just as in true sympathy, the partial suppression of individualism and of what is distinctive, we experience a superior delight and intensity of being, so it may be that in parting with all that shuts us up in the spiritual penthouse of an Ego — *all*, without exception or reserve — we may for the first time know what true life is, and what are its ineffable privileges. Yet it is not on this ground that acceptance can be hoped for the conception of immortality here crudely and vaguely presented in contrast to that *bourgeois* eternity of individualism and the family affections, which is probably the great charm of Spiritualism to the majority of its proselytes. It is doubtful whether the things that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," have ever taken strong hold of the imagination, or reconciled it to the loss of all that is definitely associated with the joy and movement of living. Not as consummate bliss can the dweller on the lower plane presume to commend that transcendent life. At the utmost he can but echo the revelation that came to the troubled mind in *Sartor Resartus*: "A man may do without happiness, and instead thereof find blessedness." It is no sublimation of hope, but the necessities of thought that compel us to seek the condition of true being and immortality elsewhere than in the satisfactions of individualism. True personality can only subsist in consciousness by participation of that of which we can only say that it is the very negation of individuality in any sense in which individuality can be conceived by us. What is the content or "matter" of consciousness we cannot define, save by vaguely calling it ideal? But we can say that in that region individual interests and concerns will find no place. Nay, more, we can affirm that only then has the influx of the new life a free channel when the obstructions of individualism are already removed. Hence the necessity of the mystic death, which is as truly a death as that which restores our physical body to the elements. "Neither I am, nor is aught mine, nor do I exist," a passage which has been well explained by a Hindu Theosophist (Peary Chand Mitra), as meaning "that when the spiritual state is arrived at, I and *mine*, which belong to the *finite mind*, cease, and the soul, living in the *universum* and participating in infinity with God, manifests its infinite state," I cannot refrain from quoting the following passage from the same instructive writer: —

Every human being has a soul which, while not separable from the brain or nerves, is *mind*, or *Jivatma*, or sentient soul, but when regenerated or spiritualised by *yog*, it is free from bondage, and manifests the divine essence. It rises above all phenomenal states — joy, sorrow, grief, fear, hope, and in fact all states resulting in pain or pleasure, and becomes blissful, realising immortality, infinitude, and felicity of wisdom within itself. The sentient soul is nervous, sensational, emotional, phenomenal, and impressional. It constitutes the natural life and is finite. The soul and the non-soul are thus the two landmarks. What is non-soul is *prakrit*, or created. It is not the lot of every one to know what soul is, and therefore millions live and die possessing minds cultivated in intellect and feeling but not raised to the soul state. In proportion as one's soul is emancipated from *prakrit* or sensuous bondage, in that proportion his approximation to the soul state is attained; and it is this that constitutes disparities in the intellectual, moral, and religious culture of human beings, and their consequent approximation to God. — *Spiritual Stray Leaves*, Calcutta, 1879.

He also cites some words of Fichte, which prove that the like conclusion is reached in the philosophy of Western idealism: "The real spirit which comes to itself in human consciousness is to be regarded as an

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impersonal pneuma — universal reason, nay, as the spirit of God Himself; and the good of man's whole development, therefore, can be no other than to substitute the universal for the individual consciousness".

That there may be, and are affirmed to be, intermediate stages, states, or discrete degrees, will, of course, be understood. The aim of this paper has been to call attention to the abstract condition of the immortalised consciousness; negatively it is true, but it is on this very account more suggestive of practical applications. The connection of this Society with the Spiritualist movement is so intimately sympathetic, that I hope one of these may be pointed out without offence. It is that immortality cannot be phenomenally demonstrated. What I have called psychic survival — can be, and probably is. But immortality is the attainment of a state, and that state the very negation of phenomenal existence. Another consequence refers to the direction our culture should take. We have to compose ourselves to death. Nothing less. We are each of us a complex of desires, passions, interests, modes of thinking and feeling, opinions, prejudices, judgment of others, likings and dis-likings, affections, aims, public and private. These things, and whatever else constitutes the recognisable content of our present temporal individuality, are all in derogation of our ideal of impersonal being — saving consciousness, the manifestation of being. In some minute, imperfect, relative, and almost worthless sense we may do right in many of our judgments, and amiable in many of our sympathies and affections. We cannot be sure even of this. Only people unhabituated to introspection and self-analysis are quite sure of it. These are ever those who are loudest in their censures, and most dogmatic in their opinionative utterances. In some coarse, rude fashion they are useful, it may be indispensable to the world's work, which is not ours, save in a transcendental sense and operation. We have to strip ourselves of all that, and to seek perfect passionless tranquility. Then we may hope to die. Meditation, if it be deep, and long, and frequent enough, will teach even our practical Western mind to understand the Hindu mind in its yearning for Nirvana. One infinitesimal atom of the great conglomerate of humanity, who enjoys the temporal, sensual life, with its gratifications and excitements as much as most, will testify with unaffected sincerity that he would rather be annihilated altogether than remain for ever what he knows himself to be, or even recognisably like it. And he is a very average moral specimen. I have heard it said, "The world's life and business would come to an end, there would be an end to all its healthy activity, an end of commerce, arts, manufactures, social intercourse, government, law, and science, if we were all to devote ourselves to the practice of *Yoga*, which is pretty much what your ideal comes to." And the criticism is perfectly just and true. Only I believe it does not go quite far enough. Not only the activities of the world but the phenomenal world itself, which is upheld in consciousness, would disappear or take new, more interior, more living, and more significant forms, at least for humanity, if the consciousness of humanity was itself raised to a superior state. Readers of St. Martin and of that impressive book of the late James Hinton "Man and his Dwelling-place", especially if they have also by chance been students of the idealistic philosophies, will not think this suggestion extravagant. If all the world were Yogis, the world would have no need of those special activities, the ultimate end and purpose of which, by-the-by, our critic would find it not easy to define. And if only a few withdraw, the world can spare them. Enough of that.

Only let us not talk of this ideal of impersonal, universal being in individual consciousness as an unverified dream. Our sense and impatience of limitations are the guarantees that they are not final and insuperable. Whence is this power of standing outside myself, of recognising the worthlessness of the pseudo-judgments, of the prejudices with their lurid colouring of passion, of the temporal interests, of the ephemeral appetites, of all the sensibilities of egoism, to which I nevertheless surrender myself, so that they indeed seem myself? Through and above this troubled atmosphere I see a being, pure, passionless, rightly measuring the proportions and relations of things, for whom there is, properly speaking, no

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present, with its phantasms, falsities, and half-truths: who has nothing personal in the sense of being opposed to the whole of related personalities: who sees the truth rather than struggles logically towards it, and truth of which I can at present form no conception: whose activities are unimpeded by intellectual doubt, unperverted by moral depravity, and who is indifferent to results, because he has not to guide his conduct by calculation of them, or by any estimate of their value. I look up to him with awe, because in being passionless he sometimes seems to me to be without love. Yet I know that this is not so; only that his love is diffused by its range, and elevated in abstraction beyond my gaze and comprehension. And I see in this being my ideal, my higher, my only true, in a word, my immortal self.